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RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Exploring Ways to Improve English Language in Mixed Proficiency Class

*Ahmad Gul Momand[1*], Obaidullah Zahid[2], Fareed Sahil[3]*

*1,2,3Department of English, Faculty of Languages and Literature, Nangarhar University, Afghanistan.*

**ABSTRACT**

English Language has been a part of curriculum in Afghanistan whether it is lycée or university level. This article examines challenges students have been facing in learning English language. Date was collected through a questionnaire. As we are reading their responses, their English has been improved despite of some minor challenges, while they preferred to read and listen to improve their English language. Reading has been viewed mainly as an interactive process between the reader and the text. As a matter of fact, the reader comprehends a text without any external interference, or it is one of the most important skills employed by a language learner to know words, their meaning and pragmatics and it is all for achieving accuracy and fluency. Findings suggest there must be more quizzes frequently to make students work hard and if there are more real-life scenarios for English speaking that will be highly effective.

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## Introduction

As a foreign language, English is the most popular language in Afghanistan (IAM, n.d.). There are tens of English language departments alone, while there are high number of private universities, institutes and centers offer bachelor, one year and short-term programs. For first time in the history of English Department in Nangarhar Afghanistan, we are working on exploring what are the challenges in learning and improving English and what can be the solutions. For English teachers, it is highly important to know if they need additional efforts to help students better acquire English language proficiency. Language proficiency is commonly defined as the capability to utilize language skills effectively and correctly and to command its techniques and purposes. It is characterized by the language functions that are needed in particular situations (Hawkins, 2004).

Gaining mastery in a language involves cultivating a vast linguistic repertoire that enables students to converse about different cultural and contextual scenarios. Indeed, learners must adjust their language application based on intent and context by employing diverse strategies and genres. Sterns (1983: 341) defines proficiency as: "the actual performance of specific individual learners or groups of learners". Furthermore, he contends that language proficiency encompasses the intuitive command of language that includes linguistic, cognitive, affective, and sociocultural significances, along with the ability to utilize the language with the greatest focus on communication and the least focus on forms.

*Corresponding Author:
Email: ahmadgul.momand@nu.edu.af (**Momand, A. G.**)
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Language Proficiency has typically been depicted, in numerous studies, as a standard for assessing foreign language instruction and acquisition that is examined from two viewpoints; one pertains to the various degrees of proficiency, while the other viewpoint emphasizes the identification of the elements of language proficiency. Regarding the first viewpoint, it is focused on the levels of the attained or the necessary command of the foreign language, whereas the latter is theoretically intricate and debatable since it perceives proficiency as multiple distinct elements (Stern, 1983).

English language teachers work hard enough to provide students learning materials prescribed by curriculum to meet students' needs but still there are challenges emerging in language classes. All these students are adult who have limited opportunity to improve their English outside the class, while limited opportunity is an disadvantage for adult students who are acquiring second or foreign language in an environment where target language is not spoken (Nina, 2013). In addition to this, the main case is the mixed-proficiency language classes. It means, students of different language proficiency (beginner, intermediate, and advanced) are put in the same classroom to receive English language instruction. Some students are beginners with very little ability to communicate while others are advanced students able to handle almost any communicative situation they are given. Students with intermediate language proficiency can comprehend key concepts, interact fluently in brief exchanges, and participate in simple communication scenarios. Professors are confused to understand the situation, arranging components in a clever and harmonic way to achieve their objectives and give every student an equal chance to learn. And at the meantime, students are also struggling to improve their English. In order to achieve fluency and accuracy students stressed on reading and listening.

Reading has been viewed mainly as an interactive process between the reader and the text. In fact, the reader interacts dynamically with the text in order to elicit meaning. In other words, it is the skill of word recognition, phonemic decoding, and text comprehension. Meaning is constructed through a process which includes productive interactions which involves the reader's background knowledge, the information in the text, and the reading situation context. In other words, it is the process of creating meaning through the dynamic interaction between the reader's existing knowledge, the text information, the author, and the context of the reading situation. It includes the integration of various skills which lead to good text comprehension. In fact, readers implement reading strategies, pick out information from the text, and use their background knowledge in order to achieve their reading purpose. For advanced learners, reading should be taught at higher levels. Actually, students should know how to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words, understand the sequence of events, find out the main ideas, evaluate content, discover the author's purpose, and give personal judgments (Dutcher, 1990).

The complex nature of reading includes the correlations of language elements with meaning. The failure to recognize particular lexical items could lead to false understandings and wrong text interpretations. Therefore, students need to understand the relationships between words and the semantic patterns of lexical items. Moreover, in order to be efficient readers, learners should have a good understanding of the grammatical devices and the lexical patterns so as to grasp meaning in particular contexts. Furthermore, the process of reading includes students' ability to acquire the skills of gathering information from the lexical and the grammatical signals in order to detect the architecture of sentences and paragraphs and derive adequate comprehension of the text. Skilled readers are able to discover the link between the text and its author and are aware of the writer's attitudes, goals, and intentions. For example, the author could intend to describe an experience, inculcate an ideology, narrate a story, or to develop an argument or a scientific theory. Another relationship that concerns the reading process is that which exists between the reader and the text. Obviously, the reader's reaction to the text builds a particular point of view and leads to conclusions and judgements about the text (B Geoffrey, 1980).

As far as English Language Teaching, (ELT) is concerned, reading is one of the chief purposes of the teaching-learning process. Indeed, it is a valuable source of foreign language learning as it involves several tasks that provide students with various chances to improve their language knowledge and practice reading for language learning purposes. The reading instruction is a particular challenge to language teachers as they need to acquire a sound knowledge of theories, methods, and materials. In fact, they are required to apply appropriate and useful strategies in order to reach higher achievements. Certainly, high quality reading instruction involves an integration of many processes and approaches which are imposed by students' levels and interests. In this respect, researchers have argued that effective teaching of reading includes

devoting sufficient time to the reading task in order to accomplish copious goals as time determines the choice of methodology and materials adopted (Nuttal, 2005).

Fluency in second language acquisition (L2) is considered a prerequisite for proficiency. Accuracy, complexity, and fluency are the three key components of L2 proficiency that researchers perceive as being multiple (Barkhuizen, 2005).

When a speaker is fluent, it means they can communicate without stuttering or hesitation and with ease. The capacity to communicate explicitly, effortlessly, and with little interruptions or hesitations is referred to as fluency. This is more about being able to communicate proficiently compared to it is about having perfect grammar or pronunciation. Fluency's significance comes from its application to everyday conversation. While precision is important, communication can be hampered by concentrating only on error-free speaking. Fluency enables students to comfortably express themselves, engage in dialogue, and successfully handle social situations. It encourages consistent practice as well as the growth of other linguistic abilities. The 1980s saw the development of the notion of fluency as a result of scholars' realization that linguistic precision alone was not sufficient (Brumfit, 1984).

Methods that focus on fluency promote the natural utilization of language, which is crucial for communication in everyday interactions. To sum up, fluency is an essential part of L2 competence. It is an essential component of language acquisition success because it allows pupils to utilize the language fluently and successfully in everyday contexts.

This research article examines challenges faced by English language students and suggest their solutions for several reasons. First, students expressed what they think of their problems. Secondly, they pointed out what can improve their English and finally it will help teachers to arrange their classroom activities to achieve the objectives they set for their students, and it is only possible with the help of questionnaire and close reading the case.

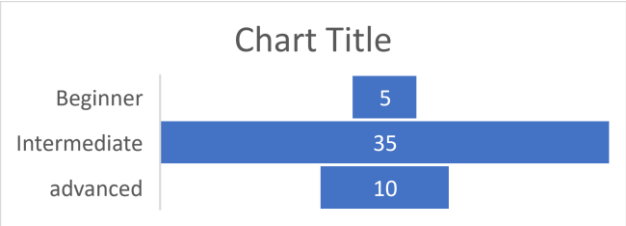
## Materials and Methods

Finding challenges in mixed proficiency language class and to offer them solutions is vital and that is why students' opinions and perceptions are vital components in the identifying the case. At English Department, second year students participated in answering questionnaire through which the data was collected. We selected junior English students because they are truly in a level where a language learner has to improve his language proficiency. Questionnaire had both quantitative research and qualitative research questions. Upon data collection, the questionnaire was read and findings are shared in the following section.

## Results

English language class that we are studying has the following mixed proficiency level of students in their single group.

**Table 1. Results from the Proficiency Test Administered to Second-year Students at English Department**




**Source: (Momand, March 08,2025)**

In response to the question *how come they choose to study English*, 68 percent participants stated that they can see a better future if they know English language, while 26 percent participants replied that they like English and 4 percent did not want to study but wishing only to get a bachelor degree certificate while 2 percent responded that they had no any other choice. It means if they had another choice rather than to be studying English, they would have chosen something else.

Answering the question *what can help students improve their English language proficiency*, 34 percent students chose listening, and 30 percent participants marked reading while 26 percent preferred grammar and only 10 percent of the participants stated that by writing they can improve their English language.

Participants were asked *if they were expecting their improvement before a new semester begins*, 98 percent students had expected that their English would improve while only 2 percent had no expectations. We found that 98 percent students met their expectations while 2 percent of students who did not have any expectations stated that their English did not improve. Students who concluded that their English did not improve did not provide a solid reason.

We asked our participants *if the number of students in their class matter and how many students they think is*

*good enough number to interact with* to improve English, 48 percent participants believe that if there are 30 students in the class it would be perfect English language class. 22 percent liked a class of 25 students only while 28 percent participants suggested if the class is more than 30 students that would be ideal. And, only 2 percent of all these participants think a class of 15 students is a good English language class.

In addition to number of students in a class we asked our participants if more quizzes can make them work hard to improve their English and achieve the objectives prescribed by curriculum, 92 percent agreed that more quizzes can help them to improve their English while 8 percent did not reply to the question. We also ask them what they can request to reach their satisfaction, one quarter of third participants liked real life scenario for English speaking practices.

## Discussion

One of the goals of reading instruction is to draw meaning from text, enhance comprehension, and cultivate reading skill. Nevertheless, it is essential to progress toward higher objectives to transition from learning to read to reading to learn (Schleppegrell, 1986). mention particular goals of teaching reading such as identifying the central concepts of the text, discerning the author's viewpoint, the capacity to quickly skim a text to find specific details to comprehend and utilize an extensive vocabulary in the relevant field. According to (Mahmood, 2014)

learners who engage in reading consistently and effectively are more capable of enhancing their literacy, acquiring learning experiences, and thriving in their educational pursuits. Reading offers numerous advantages in enhancing students' language acquisition as it provides access to diverse authentic resources in the target language. It involves students in elevated levels of cognitive processing and expands their global understanding.

The fundamental aim of a reading program is to allow students to "enjoy or, at the very least, feel at ease with reading in the foreign language, and to independently read unfamiliar authentic texts, at a suitable speed, silently and with sufficient comprehension (Nuttal, 2005). Educators can improve their learners' skills in reading and comprehending various kinds of texts by providing sufficient reading instruction and effective strategies that assist them in developing independent reading.

The question emerges how come we have students of different proficiency level in the same group needs answer. It must not be only our story, it is everywhere. Anyhow, in Afghanistan public universities receive students from Ministry of Higher Education in Afghanistan after giving them an entry test not in English but in all other subjects. Ironically, the entry test, called *Cancour* (Harper, n.d.), a French word has no questions in English. Additionally, there is no placement test upon the list of successful students received. What English language staff can do is to understand their students. English teachers who are foreign language teachers must understand their students, Douglas Brown insists.

To provide studying materials to students which shall meet every students' needs English language teachers must identify the students' language proficiency sooner their semester begins. Once instructors identify their learners' proficiency level, they face the challenge of addressing the classroom experience by means of differentiating instruction. There is an underlying need in any language program to identify the linguistic competence of learners since it becomes the basis for the effective and successful implementation of language curriculum. If specific learners' needs are not identified, teaching may lack the instructional components necessary for learners to succeed in the learning of the language.

In response to the question whether they need more hours in English, 46 percent students requested if minor subjects like Psychology taught in English that would really help them to improve English. Perhaps, it would be adventurous for them to study English beyond the four skills.

## Conclusion

Despite of mixed proficiency level, students have improved their English with the close assistance of English teachers but still it is painful to find out a minor portion of the students did not improve their English because of the poor students in the group. It can be also read that students who are in beginner level cannot participate in the class activity or they cannot answer the questions asked by teachers because the questions are quickly answered by the students whose level is advanced or intermediate. It appears that students liked reading and listening to improve their English. Indeed, reading and listening have major role in second or foreign language acquisition (Piyush, 2021). There are certain recommendations: a. there shall be a separate *Cancours* for languages. b. if a separate language test cannot be administered, there shall be an entry test for English language department once students passed the general *Cancours.*

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